Ariel

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Ariel

by LovelyLotus

Summary

Will's next target lives in Baltimore, Maryland. As Hannibal and Will travel there together from their last assignment in Paris, Will plans to take his relationship with Hannibal to the next level.

Hannibal's left hand spanned almost all the way across Will's slender hip. The contrast in magnitude was unbelievably attractive. He imagined both his hands on those hips, gripping tight enough to leave bruises across Will's skin. A spray of forget-me-nots he would keep renewing, until Will's hips became a garden of Hannibal's worship and he made roses bloom there with his teeth.

Notes

This would probably make a lot more sense after reading Les Fleurs du Mal, the first work in this series.

If you want a quick summary: Basically, Hannibal and Will are both really into each other, but haven't figured that out yet. Will is an assassin and Hannibal is his handler. After sniping a target in Russia, Will, along with Hannibal, journeyed to Paris to take out the leader of a human trafficking ring. Now, their next target is in America.

Modern Kosmology

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Paris, France

Hannibal woke him up long before the sun.

Will always felt groggy after Hannibal gave him sleeping pills. While they made his sleep pleasantly dreamless, he always ended up feeling less than fully rested.

They called a cab to the airport. Sensing their mood, the driver was silent and did not speak beyond a cursory greeting. They sat next to each other, thighs lightly pressed together. Hannibal was checking something on his phone—some flight or job detail. Will wondered if the bodies had been found yet. He rubbed sleep from his tired eyes.

Hannibal's hand moved to grip his curls, tugging his head to rest on Hannibal's shoulder.

"Rest, Brangusis. It's still a ways to the airport.

If the man wanted to get drool all over his coat sleeve, Will would happily oblige. He drifted off, eyes barely focusing on Hannibal's screen. It was the news

"Anything?" he murmured.

"No. Not yet."

"Good." He yawned, letting his eyes flutter shut. Hannibal's fingers gently brushed through his curls—a pleasant parting sensation before he finally dropped off.

Aéroport de Paris-Charles-de-Gaulle

Will was always more pliable the day after a kill. Hannibal would be lying if he said he didn't enjoy it immensely. The entire car ride to the airport, he had the unique pleasure of having a warm, sleepy Will cradled against him. It was a tragedy to have to move from the position and wake him up when they arrived. After they found their gate, Hannibal easily pulled Will along to do some airport shopping.

"I don't need another scarf, Kolenka," Will grumbled in a perfect Russian accent. They were back to being Alexei and Nikolai. It was easier to travel together as a couple most times. Their color palettes, while complementary, were too different to be mistaken for blood relatives.

“Indulge me, милый.” Will shot him a petulant look but compliantly tilted his ivory neck. Hannibal’s ire rose as he again saw the place that the last target had marred Will’s neck with his teeth. He really should have plucked those out when he had the chance. He arranged the Prussian blue scarf around Will’s throat so the mark was covered. *Much better*

“We’ll take it,” he told the sales clerk. She rang it up for them.

“Where should we go next?”

Will frowned petulantly. “How about we just go to our gate?”

Hannibal checked his watch. “There’s still half an hour until boarding starts. Do you need a new watch, Alyoshenka?”

“No,” Will grumbled.

“We might as well check it out,” Hannibal said, reaching for Will’s hand.

Will rolled his eyes as Hannibal moved towards yet another store. “You’re spoiling me,” he complained.

“You deserve to be spoiled, родной мой,” Hannibal said, lifting Will’s hand to press a kiss to his smooth knuckles. The endearment was more special than the others.

Will blushed past his cheekbones, delicate as the underside of a cherry blossom petal. Hannibal loved making him speechless in this way. When they had first met, Will had been so starved of affection and touch. Hannibal had sought to remedy that, but even now, after their relationship had become a perfect synthesis of best friends and family, his darling was still easily overwhelmed by both. Hannibal relished his persisting ability to call forth this exquisite vulnerability. They completed each other. “Won’t you indulge me, darling?”

Will nodded wordlessly.

Hannibal smiled, victorious. “Thank you.”

Somewhere over the Atlantic

Hannibal always took him shopping the day after a kill. It was a concrete, uncharacteristically transparent pattern. Killing took a certain mental toll on Will. Despite what Hannibal thought, he wasn’t a natural at murder and assassination. His job was tolerable at best—he certainly didn’t delight in it like Hannibal did or wanted him to.

It was easiest if he could empathize with his mentor before the murder. Let some of Hannibal’s colder traits find aspect in himself. And once he was far enough along, it was just finishing the motion—halting the circular rhythm of their collapsing clocks. He tried to avoid

meeting their eyes, but it was often inevitable. Their bloodless faces found new life in his nightmares, their death-bound thoughts and expressions transmogrified into endless screams and broken trains of empathy. The nightmares faded in time, but the first day was always the worst.

And Hannibal, the bastard, loved taking advantage. Suit fittings, shoe shopping, and boutique crawls were all reserved for the one day Will was too tired to stage any protest.

But Will always got his revenge. He had an entire list of things Hannibal hated, created from almost a decade of their partnership.

“What are you reading, Will?” Hannibal asked, obviously bored. They didn’t have to keep up the pretense now that they were in the privacy of first class.

“What?” Will asked, feigning distractedness. Hannibal despised it when Will didn’t give him his full attention (#2 on the list).

“I asked you what book you’re reading,” Hannibal repeated, frowning.

“Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* ,” Will answered, flashing the book cover to his partner. Hannibal hated Kant (#8). Aesthetics over ethics and all that.

“I don’t remember buying you that.”

Will rolled his eyes (#5). “You don’t purchase everything of mine, Hannibal. I’m quite well-off on my own, you know. I can buy what I want.”

“You’re quite right, dear. My apologies. I was just surprised by your… eccentric taste.”

“You think Kant is eccentric?” Will asked, hiding a smile.

“I suppose his ideas are unfortunately mainstream. Very well then, what are you reading about?”

“I very much doubt you want to debate Kant with me,” Will said, raising one of his eyebrows.

“I don’t know what you mean, Will. I find his attempts to create a universal ethical system amusingly futile.”

“You think he’s boorish.”

Hannibal smiled. “Well, *you* said it, Mylimasis. Not me.”

Will rolled his eyes and went back to the book. Hannibal kept looking at him, probably hoping to continue the conversation, but Will ignored him (#4).

“Have you already finished *Les Fleurs du Mal* ?”

“What?”

Hannibal scowled. “I asked if you’ve finished *Les Fleurs du Mal* .”

Will didn’t look up. “Yes, I finished *re* reading it. I’m on *Ariel* now.”

“Sylvia Plath? Would you mind reading me some lines out loud, Will?”

“I don’t know, Hannibal” Will dragged out. “I’m quite attached to my current book. Besides, *Ariel* is in the carry-on I stowed away.”

“I can fetch it for you.”

Will shook his head.

“Will, *please* ?”

Hannibal rarely begged him for anything. After some deliberation, Will gave in. Positive reinforcement and all that. “Fine.”

Hannibal smiled.

“Perhaps I will also read you some lines. Here, let me trade them off,” Hannibal said reaching for Kant. Will let him take it. He knew he would probably never see the book again. He couldn’t really bring himself to care. He had a mental list of all the books Hannibal hated. Kant was just one of many.

“Would you like to read first?” Hannibal asked once he had retrieved the book.

“No. You go.”

Hannibal flipped to a random page and smiled. Will paid attention in a vague sort of way. His mind floated like fog—land-locked cloud dissolving into the barbed and jagged darkness of the stanzas.

“I am terrified by this dark thing / That sleeps in me; / All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity,” Hannibal recited.

The line was so *wrong* , so opposed to what Hannibal intrinsically was that laughter sprung from Will involuntarily. He gasped for breath between his mirth. Hannibal paused in his reading.

“Most are hard-pressed to find humour in Plath. What have you found so amusing?”

“I can’t imagine you’ve ever been terrified by the dark things in the corners of your mind, Hannibal.”

Hannibal smiled, cat-like. “You presume too much, Will. There are parts of myself I struggle to recognize on some days.”

Will scoffed. “If any part of your persona was a stranger, you’d invite it to dinner and devour it whole.”

Hannibal laughed. “That may be true…”

“It is. Your mind is too organized to allow any part of yourself to act unregulated or unfiltered.”

“You have a surprisingly high opinion of my self-control, Will.”

“Is it surprising?”

“Yes, considering it often falters around you.” Hannibal’s eyes darkened to a devouring gaze. Will trembled almost imperceptibly in response, heart speeding up.

“Perhaps then I am one of the stranger, uncontrollable fragments of you.”

“You are an intrinsic part of me, Will. Just as I am an intrinsic part of you. But I wonder what you do with your dark, feathery impulses.”

Will closed his eyes, turning slightly away. “I can’t stomach them like you do, Hannibal. I don’t have your appetite. You know that.”

Hannibal’s fingers reached forward to cup both sides of Will’s face and bring him close, thumbs delicately tracing the dark-winged curves of his eyelashes.

“That’s what you think, Will. But I know that you know how good doing bad things to bad people makes you feel, darling. I have seen you in our palace afterwards, Will, and you cannot tell me you aren’t euphoric.”

Will’s eyes flew open in surprise, his lashes brushing against Hannibal’s cheeks, delicate as a butterfly’s wing.

“No.”

“*Yes*.”

Will pulled back from Hannibal’s hold, glaring.

“Stop it."

“Stop what, Will?”

“Stop whispering through the chrysalis, Hannibal. I am what I am, and I know who I am.”

“Yes. And you are one who is in an infinite state of becoming. You constantly alchemize yourself, Will—each repetition reifying your persona into a more authentic, yet wholly different you. You are my kaleidoscope. It’s why I cannot ever know you completely.”

“You know me more completely than anyone else, Hannibal. And that includes myself.”

“Then I must be right.”

“No. You’re wrong about this.

Hannibal chuckled. “Then tell me you hate it. Tell me you do not enjoy giving them what we know they deserve.”

Will scowled. “Is that a challenge, Hannibal?”

“Tell me you do not enjoy elevating them, Will. Taking a canvas of blood and bone and shaping into your design.”

Will paused, then turned to look Hannibal straight in the eye.

“You elevate. I desecrate.”

“How can you see the beauty in my work without recognizing the same quality in your own?”

“I can’t recognize what’s not there, Hannibal. Now can you let me through? I need to stretch my legs and use the bathroom.”

Hannibal’s eyes narrowed, well accustomed to Will’s flightiness. He carefully stored their conversation in his memory, knowing it had ended with Will’s departure.

After Will returned, dinner was served on the aircraft. In truth, the first class fare was only marginally better than the economy class. At least they had the benefit of the bar. Hannibal didn’t eat most of the meal, much as he hated wasting food. He regretted not packing both Will and himself something.

Soon after dinner had passed, the lights on the aircraft dimmed. They both changed into more comfortable loungewear and traded conversation for a cozy silence. Eventually, Will fell asleep, head tilted against the airline window with his neck at an awkward angle.

Hannibal retrieved the large blanket he had packed for them, lifting the arm rest between their seats up and pushing their seats back until they were horizontal. He spread the blanket and carefully shifted Will into a more comfortable position.

Will made a soft fussing sound in his sleep, shifting closer. Hannibal turned on to his side and gave into the urge to gather Will up into his arms, just holding him. His head fit perfectly under Hannibal’s chin, limbs filling in the negative spaces Hannibal’s body had left behind. It was as if he had been made to rest there, soft curls brushing against the ridge of Hannibal’s jaw.

Hannibal’s left hand spanned almost all the way across Will’s slender hip. The contrast in magnitude was unbelievably attractive. He imagined both his hands on those hips, gripping tight enough to leave bruises across Will’s skin. A spray of forget-me-nots he would keep renewing, until Will’s hips became a garden of Hannibal’s worship and he made roses bloom there with his teeth.

He slowly moved his hand away, letting the images fade.

He was reminded again of how brilliant his prodigy was. Tempest in a teacup. All this: violence, mercy, compassion, darkness, light—tucked inside a fragile frame sculpted by

Venus

Hannibal caressed the back of Will's head, trying to smooth the curls there.

"*Don't worry, beloved. I am going to help you see your own grace.*"

Will woke up disoriented. He relaxed once he remembered where they were. The lights on the aircraft were still dimmed, though the soft hummings of conversation drifted in the air. Hannibal was still asleep next to him, though Will was baffled by their position. Sometime in the night, they had come together. Hannibal's hand was gripping his hip rather tightly, and his nose was pressed into Will's hair. Their legs were tangled.

His heart sped up at the unexpected intimacy of it all.

He loved Hannibal. A truth he had never admitted out loud, but rather expressed to his own soul every night before sleeping. Just like a little prayer.

He was growing tired of waiting for whatever was between them to bloom. 7 years together and the most romantic contact they had ever had was a few kisses to ensure their cover identities. It was a little embarrassing. The problem was, they had both grown a little too comfortable with what they had. Maybe Hannibal just needed some sort of symbolic gesture to show him that Will wanted more. They were close enough that this little crush probably wouldn't disrupt their friendship.

Or would it? Will's imagination took over the reigns. He could vividly see the face Hannibal would make as he rejected him. The dismay and horror. *Oh, did you think I was interested in you in this way, Will? I do apologize if I have led you on.* The apology would be the worst part—a severing of the closeness they had progressed to; where trivial, superfluous 'sorry's had been altogether banished. Then, Hannibal would ask to be reassigned and Will would get a new handler. *You do, understand, don't you, Will? It will be the best for both of us. I simply feel I cannot adequately manage someone who has misconstrued my affections so .*

Will froze as Hannibal shifted in sleep. The hand at his hip slid down to wind across his lower back. Will tried to loosen up as he was pulled even closer. Hannibal's nose made soft snuffling sounds, chasing the scent of Will's hair in his sleep. The light brush against his scalp almost tickled.

Hannibal *had* to return his affections. There was no way this didn't mean anything. Any of this. Hannibal's never-ending series of pet names for him. The frequent, casual touches. The glimpses of desire dark and liquescent in his eyes.

He would bring it to light. Strike a match under their love and illuminate it for Hannibal's eyes. He would show Hannibal how well they fit together.

He was going to seduce Hannibal Lecter.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title is from a song by Jane Weaver. The poem Hannibal reads is "Elm," by Sylvia Plath.

There was going to be a long philosophical discussion about Kant, but I figured one semester of Intro to Metaphysics did not equip me to handle it. So instead, we got poetry.

родной мой = a term of endearment used mostly by couples who have been together a crazy long time (I think-- feel free to correct me). It means something like "my closest family," though I think it is generally untranslatable.

милый = sweet

#1 on the list of Things Hannibal finds Annoying is rudeness of course. :-)

If you liked it, please leave me a comment below and subscribe. I love feedback. The next chapter is already written so it should be up by the next week or so. Thank you for reading!

Lanterns Lit

Chapter Summary

> Will's next target is Drew Klauss, patron of numerous radical movements and terrorist groups. Will also makes his move on Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

> Please read the tags carefully. They have been updated. See the notes at the end for a more detailed content warning. If you would like to skip the section with suicide, hit ctrl + f when you reach the first * and look for the second *. The section after briefly references what happened in the * section when Will tells Hannibal. Please take care of yourself.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Baltimore, Maryland

Will never believed he would come back to this city. 9 years ago, before he met Hannibal, he had been studying and living here—a time he struggled to remember now.

“The lantern festival is tonight,” Hannibal said, moving his rook forward. They were playing chess, already settled in the hotel suite. “A local told me when I was purchasing provisions.”

“You mean groceries?”

Hannibal raised his eyebrow, amused. “That’s what I said. Provisions.”

Will rolled his eyes. “I’m guessing it’ll be on the harbor?”

“Yes. It begins at sundown.”

Will frowned, moving his bishop out of harm’s way. “I didn’t factor that in. He’ll be at an office party tonight in one of the building’s on the harbor. It will be crowded.”

“That may benefit us,” Hannibal said, knocking out another of Will’s pawns. “More suspects in the worst case.”

“More witnesses in the best,” Will corrected, taking out one of Hannibal’s knights.

“It has to look like suicide, Will. Remember our orders.”

Will tapped his head with his index finger. “Eidetic memory, Hannibal. I know.”

“I will be waiting for you when you’re done.

“What, you’re not going to come see this one?” Will teased.

“Would you like me to?” Hannibal asked seriously

Will paused, watching Hannibal move his king away. “No, actually.”

“Then we’ll stick with the plan.”

“Yes. Checkmate,” Will declared, pinning the king with his last move.

Hannibal carefully examined the board and let out a resigned sigh. “That makes us 740 to 719. You are slowly catching up, Will.”

“You’re so petty.”

Hannibal smiled, not negating the accusation. “Who will you be tonight? A business associate? A janitor?”

“Charlie the intern.”

“Finally using your youthful looks to your advantage, I see. I suppose you will be shaving?”

Will frowned at the reminder. “Don’t be too heartbroken, Hannibal. As soon as this kill is over, the stubble is coming back.”

Hannibal gave him a placating, but more than slightly condescending smirk. “You will use my straight razor of course.”

“And I suppose you will be helping me shave as well? You always liked holding knives up to my throat.”

Hannibal gave him a warm look, denying nothing.

Hannibal loved dressing Will—ornamenting his young god for the battle field. His prodigy provided such a beautiful base for adornment as well—anything and everything looked exquisite on him.

It would be best to play up Will’s innocence today. He avoided styling Will’s hair, letting it fall in its usual messy curls. Without his usual barrier of scruff, Will looked at least ten years younger.

He had also acquired some business casual clothing made of material less fine than what usually graced Will’s body. It intentionally fit slightly ill, suggesting it was bought on an

intern’s budget and not tailor-made. He would burn it after the job.

He slipped a large pair of glasses on to Will’s face, then examined his beloved.

Perfect.

Will turned to look in the mirror. He laughed when he saw the frames Hannibal had picked. “These are ridiculous. Where on earth did you find them?”

“It was about locating the right source,” Hannibal explained. “Even if that source was of a slightly dubious nature.”

“Did you go thrift shopping?” Will asked.

Hannibal did not grace the question with a reply, reaching for the room service menu.

“Did you know your silence functions as a yes, Hannibal? If I was wrong, you wouldn’t have hesitated to correct me.”

“You do provoke me so, Will. I suppose next you will be ordering the cheeseburger on this deplorable menu?”

“You say that like it’s something much worse than it is.”

“It is worse enough. Anyway, I have already ordered for both of us.”

“Hannibal the Autocrat strikes again.”

Hannibal gave a miffed huff. “I kept your preferences in mind, Brangusis. You think I don’t know what you order off hotel menus by now?"

Will sighed. “I’m actually pretty tired of hotel food. I miss your cooking.”

Hannibal lit up at the unexpected compliment. “After tonight, I will feed you nothing else, Will.”

Inner Harbor, Baltimore

Will carefully watched Drew Klauss move around the room. He was sleek, like a predator cat—but there was something feigned about it. He moved in the upper tiers, talking only to the Department heads and other top officials. Will thought about how he was going to get him to the roof. They were already on the top floor of the building. Only one staircase up.

Will moved towards the windows. Three of the walls were essentially made of glass. He could see the whole room just from the reflections cast on to them. His own face also stared back at him, disguised by the large glasses Hannibal had thrifted. The view from the harbor was divine. Soon, lanterns would begin floating out into the sky.

“I don’t remember seeing you here before.”

Will turned to look at the woman speaking to him. She was wearing an ID card that said she was in the Accounting division.

He smiled and shook her hand, carefully avoiding her eyes. “Nice to meet you. My name is Charlie Moore. I’m an intern in the Marketing Department.”

“Hello, Charlie. My name’s Jessica Van and I’m part of Accounting. How has your experience been with us so far?”

“It’s been very informative. I’ve enjoyed working with the team.”

“That’s wonderful,” she said, already looking towards a group of people by the punch bowl. “If you’re ever curious about what we do up in Accounting, you can feel free to contact me and I’d be happy to meet with you.”

“I’ll remember that. Thank you.”

She smiled, then walked away.

Drew Klauss was on the move. He was leaving the room. Will followed him slowly, making sure no one noticed his departure. Klauss went up the stairs leading to the roof. Will followed, surprised that his target was going right where he needed him to for once.

They emerged onto the roof.

Will spent a moment looking at the man gazing at the city. He saw so many cracks. A broken watch face. The outer shell crumbled away to reveal the man within.

The small light of his cigarette flickered like a firefly.

Klauss was now on the phone. The sound echoed over the roof.

Hi, this is Nancy. I can’t answer the phone right now, but please leave me a message and I’ll try to call you back as soon as I can! Thank you. Beep .

Will moved forward into the light. “Mr. Klauss?”

The man huffed, letting loose a stream of smoke. “Who the hell are you?”

Will smiled as innocently as possible. “My name is Charlie. I’m an intern here. I didn’t mean to interrupt your smoke. I just can’t believe I’m finally meeting you.”

“Well, Charlie. Pleasure is all mine. You should rejoin the party now.”

Rude.

Will moved forward. “Well, you see. I wanted to talk to you about an opportunity for employment here.”

“I’m not in the mood, kid.”

Will made a pointed glance at the phone. “Problems at home?”

“Shut up.”

“Let me guess. Your wife doesn’t talk to you anymore. She left a year ago, and you don’t know how to get her back.”

Drew looked completely taken aback. “How the fuck did you know that? Who are you?”

“I’m just good at reading people,” Will explained, taking off his glasses.

Drew froze. Prey instinct finally coming in to play. He was trapped on the roof. “You’re not an intern here.”

“No. I’m not.” *

“What are you going to do to me?”

“It’s not what I’m going to do to you, it’s more of what you’re going to do to yourself. I’m just here to talk, really. Calm down, Drew.”

Will moved forward to stand by the other man. He looked down contemplatively. “You’ve thought about a lot, haven’t you? Dying. It’s why this is your favorite place.”

The man was frozen. Will turned to look into his eyes. Everything he wanted to know about Drew Klauss was written there, laid out as definitively as the stars. Some people died long before you met them. The longer Will looked, the more he understood. Spider lilies and rue bloomed in the corners of his eyes.

“You come here when you think of her. When you think of Caroline. Because what kind of father kills his own daughter?”

“I didn’t kill her!”

“No. You just enabled the man that did.”

“She wasn’t supposed to be there. She told me she was in class! I didn’t know she was going to be at the protest.”

“She didn’t tell you because she knew you didn’t approve of her activism.”

“I loved her and she went behind my back.”

“But in the end, you were the one who really betrayed her, weren’t you?”

Klauss was turning paler by the second. He opened and closed his lips like a goldfish out of water. Will was suffocating him with words.

“Your daughter is dead, and your wife knows exactly what you did.”

“She can’t. I never told her.”

“She found out. Who do you think sent me here, Drew? She can’t forgive you and she can’t bear to love you anymore.” Will was lying about who hired him, but he knew Drew would never find out.

“That’s not…. Nancy?”

“You keep breaking people, Drew. It’s a nasty habit. Killed your daughter, your best friend, your wife’s lover—oh wait, that *was* your best friend.” Will shrugged his shoulders dismissively. “There is no one left, Drew. No one cares if you go. In fact, I think they’d all be rather relieved. You're a monster.”

Drew began crying, tears silently falling down his face.

“And that’s not the worst part is it?”

Will leaned forward to whisper in the man’s ear. He spoke for over five minutes, his words like nails on coffins. He whispered worst fears. He whispered the feelings that only emerged in the dead of night. He whispered dying thoughts.

And the man cracked like ice over a frozen lake.

Will handed him the gun through his sleeve. No prints. One of Klauss’s own company’s products. The wind would snatch away the sound of the bullet.

Drew took it.

“She’ll forgive you with this,” Will said. “They both will. You’re going to see Caroline, Drew.”

Klauss stared at the gun. “You’re wrong, Charlie. I won’t be seeing her in hell.”

He aimed and fired. One bullet to the heart. The casual cruelty of the human body and its unspeakable frailty at work. He stared straight into Will’s eyes as he died, collapsing onto the rooftop floor. His clock ticked to a stop, the cracked glass face glimmering in the light that left his eyes. The spider lilies and rue wilted in the howling wind.

“She forgives you,” Will said as the first lanterns begin floating into the sky. “She forgives you,” Will repeated as the man dropped the gun to clutch his chest wound. “She forgives you.”

Klauss stuttered out something incomprehensible, hissing at the pain, voice breaking. Will thought it sounded something like his daughter’s name.

Then: Emptiness. Blood pooled.

Will looked for one moment longer, then turned to the skyline. *

He watched the lanterns lift across the roof of the heavens, reflecting on the surface of the water, creating a contained galaxy below. Below where Hannibal was waiting for him.

Then he walked out.

"You're being quiet."

Hannibal watched his prodigy tap his fingers in a nervous rhythm against the table. They were dining together in a restaurant with a beautiful view of the harbor. The lanterns were truly gorgeous in the sky and on the water. He had purchased two for Will and himself to send off after dinner. Will had thankfully changed from the truly terrible suit and was wearing more well-fitted and appropriate clothing for the restaurant.

Hannibal subtly scented his companion. The faint scent of acid lingered in the air. Will was anxious—almost sick with nerves. *What had frightened him so?*

"What happened?" he inquired.

"Nothing happened. The job went well."

"You killed him, then?"

"No… I…"

Will paused, reaching up with his hand to pinch the bridge of his nose.

"Yes?"

"I talked him into killing himself. I… I empathized with him, then pushed all the right buttons. I said everything he never wanted to hear. I… I broke him. Then he shot himself. He scattered like a swarm of flies."

"You didn't just make it look like suicide then. It *was* suicide," Hannibal said, impressed. He took a sip of the wine.

"It was so easy, Hannibal," Will confided, looking terribly frightened. "It's not supposed to be that easy."

"I find the mental machinations of people are far frailer than their bodies."

"I feel wrong."

Hannibal's gaze sharpened. "You know what he did, Will. Are you having regrets?"

"No… But he felt so guilty…"

"Does feeling guilt absolve him of his crimes, Will?"

“I know that it doesn’t, Hannibal. I just wish I had killed him instead.”

“Then you know what to do next time. Don’t think too much, Will. You did it. It’s over now.”

“It doesn’t feel over. I still hear him saying his daughter’s name in my head.”

This was the problem: Leftovers. Half-broken chains of empathy that still resonated in Will’s soul. If Hannibal could, he would take a hammer to those chains. *Empathize with me* , he wanted to say. *Forget anyone else. Slip into our palace like slipping into a warm bath and I will take care of you there* .

“Shall I make hot chocolate for you when we get back?”

“No, Hannibal. Not tonight… I need to contemplate.”

“What you need is to let go of him, Will.”

“I don’t know how.”

“Just be with me for a little while. Shall I call for the check?”

Will nodded.

Hannibal gestured to beckon the waiter over.

They walked back along the harbor. The festival had mostly ended. Vendors were closing up their stalls and there were few people around.

He and Will released their lanterns in a darker stretch of the harbor. The two lights circled each other, as bound together as the ones who had released them. They traced the lanterns’ paths until they grew too distant to be visible. Then, they walked back to the hotel room.

“Would you like to play chess?”

“No… Can we watch something?” Will asked.

“Anything you’d like."

Eventually, Will found a dog movie playing on cable. They both reclined back on one of the beds, barely touching.

“Where should we go next, Hannibal? It’s downtime, right?”

“Yes. How do you feel about Florence?”

“Again? We just went there last year. You really don’t want to go somewhere new?”

If Hannibal had his druthers, they would return to Florence every year. “Well, where do *you* want to go?”

Will paused. “Prague.”

Hannibal looked back at him in surprise.

“It’s been two years. I want to have a more pleasant experience there.”

“Then we’ll go to Prague.”

Will smiled.

As if by mutual agreement, they both turned back to the movie.

Only a few minutes had passed when it happened.

“Hannibal,” Will called softly, getting his attention.

Hannibal turned back to his companion. Before he could blink, Will’s lips were on him.

Hannibal tasted like Malbec and pomegranates. He tasted like everything Will had ever wanted. He tasted like home.

Will closed his eyes, clinging tightly to Hannibal’s shirt. They should have started doing this forever ago. He was just about to bite down on Hannibal’s lower lip to start something more when he was gently pushed back.

At first, he didn’t understand. Maybe Hannibal needed to breathe? But when he looked up, his mentor’s face was blank. It felt a little like being stabbed.

“Will, you don’t need this from me right now. You’re still confused. I think the burden of empathizing with the target has gotten to you.”

So many questions burst into the void behind his teeth: *Are you rejecting me? Did I misread you? What’s happening right now?* But Will couldn’t speak. His mind had instantly jumped from initiation to preservation. He couldn’t lose Hannibal, so he said nothing.

“It’s okay, Will. I know you didn’t mean it. A clutch for balance so to speak. Are you sure you wouldn’t like some hot choc—?”

He interrupted. “No. I… I don’t want that right now, Hannibal.”

Talking felt like chewing broken glass.

“Are you certain, Will?”

“Yes.”

They turned back towards the movie. Once it ended, Will silently turned off the television. His mind screamed at him to leave. He couldn’t bear being next to Hannibal right now.

Have I lost you? Did I ever have you at all?

He was one infinite desert place and the loneliness smothered away all the heat of the sun. He was bereft. Hannibal had left him empty. He looked up the closest bar.

It had been a soft, chaste kiss. Hannibal had wanted to melt into it so badly, but he couldn’t help but notice Will’s posture. His eyes were closed shut and his hand was grasping at Hannibal’s shirt. *A reach for stability* , Hannibal realized. It was unacceptable.

Will had looked up at him, confused. His pupils had been dilated and his cheeks splashed pink. It was a beautiful, but forbidden vision. A picture that still echoed in his mind with the clarity of sound.

Will hadn’t said anything then. He had probably realized how right Hannibal was.

Hannibal moved to get ready for bed. When he had returned from the bathroom, Will had changed. Not into his pajamas, but into dark clothes that were significantly tighter on him.

“Hey, Hannibal. I’m gonna go out for a little bit.”

“I’ll come with you,” he said, prepared to get dressed again.

“No. I want to go alone.”

Hannibal tried not to let the sting of rejection hurt.

“When will you be back?”

Will moved to stand by the door.

“I don’t know.”

“Take the room key.”

“Okay.”

Within seconds, Will was out the door.

Hannibal brought his book to bed and turned on the side table light, shutting off the main room lights. He reread the same passage over and over again, waiting for Will to come home and ignoring the overwhelming waves of regret he felt.

Even if it had been a clutch for balance, Hannibal should have taken advantage. Wiped all thoughts from Will's mind but thoughts of him. Of them together.

Hannibal should have moved over him like a tide. Dragged him underwater. Deprived him of air. Bitten his lips until they were swollen and flushed. Made love to him until they became two lights tangled together in the dark sheets of the hotel bed—their own personal night sky.

Have I lost you? Hannibal thought in despair, remembering the sad confusion on Will's face after he had pushed him away.

No. It was better this way.

Will was spectacularly drunk. In fact, he had probably reached "drunk" 5 shots and a whiskey ago. Now, he was on the dance floor, doing a little number he liked to call 'The Sad and Delusional Worm.' It was called that because that was how Hannibal had made him feel on the inside.

"Oh, dear," the dark-haired lady said. "So the love of your life just rejected you?"

Will nodded, mute.

"Did you confess?"

"I kissed him," Will slurred. "And he pushed me away and offered to drug me."

The dark-haired lady's eyebrows raised. "Um, I'm ignoring that last part for now. But did he say anything after you kissed him?"

"He told me I was confused."

"Oof. Maybe it's time to move on, Angel Eyes?"

"No. I *like* like him," Will explained. "Also, we live together, so I can't move."

"You both live together?"

"Yeah. But we're also best friends. He's my only family in the whole world."

"Are you two related?"

"No." Will shook his head vigorously. He hiccuped. "I mean we care take—take care of each other."

"Okay. What if you tried making him jealous?"

"Too obvious. He knows me like the back of my hand."

“Back of *his* hand?”

“Yeah. That too.”

“Okay. Maybe do something more romantic? If he’s the kind of guy that likes being romanced, maybe he thought your kiss meant something else?

“Something else?” Will stood up after a brief pause, euphoric with sudden insight. “I’m gonna make him dinner!” Will told the dark-haired lady, whispering in her ear. “With candles, pomegranates, antlers, and skulls. He loves antlers and skulls so much.”

“Oof, can you lower your voice, Angel eyes? Almost blew off my ear.”

“Sorry,” Will told her, repentant. “I love you. Thank you so much… ?”

“Beverly,” the dark-haired lady told him. “Beverly Katz.”

“Yes. Thank you, Bethany Cats,” Will said, giving her a sloppy kiss on the cheek.

“I can see why he’s confused,” the dark-haired lady muttered.

“He’s going to be mine, Bethany. We’re gonna get married and have a daughter named Mischa and 15 dogs.”

“Only 15?”

“Yes. He doesn’t like dog hair everywhere.”

Bethany nodded understandingly. She was so smart.

Will turned to the man behind the counter. “Bartender! Can I have another whiskey?!”

“Okay, buddy,” Bethany interceded. “You’re pretty plastered. I think that may be a bad idea. Can I take you home?”

“I don’t have a home because he’s my home,” Will explained, still hiccuping.

“That’s very sweet, but where are you staying?”

Will waved towards the street. “That way.”

“Did you take a taxi here?”

Will shrugged.

“Okay. Don’t get mad, but I’m gonna check your pockets.”

“No. You can’t,” Will explained, moving back as Cats stepped forward.

“Stop moving. I’m trying to take you home.”

“I can’t see him like this. He thinks my body is a temple.”

“And no alcohol goes in the temple?”

“Only the alcohol he gives me.”

“That’s a bit controlling.”

“He’s a control freak,” Will explained. “He picks everything I eat, drink, and wear. But I don’t really care, so it’s okay.”

“Umm, Bud. That’s not sounding super healthy.”

“We’re like one person most of the time. We like the same things. We hate the same people.” Will’s eyes welled up with tears. “But he rejected me.”

“Don’t cry. Remember you’re making him dinner? With pomegranates and horns?”

“Antlers,” Will corrected.

“Yes, that.”

“He has to love me, Cats. I know he loves me.”

“Maybe he just thinks of you as belonging to him?”

“I *am* his. And he’s mine.”

“Okay. You know what, Angel Eyes? I’m gonna bring you to my place and let you sleep this off on the couch.”

“Not safe,” Will replied.

“I promise you: neither myself nor my two roommates will hurt you.”

“You shouldn’t bring strangers home from the bar,” Will clarified with another hiccup.

“All three of us work at the FBI. I think we’ll be fine. Now, are you coming?”

“Okay,” Will said. “Okay.”

“You need to pay your tab?”

“I already did.”

“Okay, let’s get out of here. Hey, what’s your name?”

“Will.”

“Will, I promise things are gonna look a lot better in the morning. Now let’s go.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter title from a song by Son Lux. Lantern scene inspired by Tangled.

Perhaps this turned slightly crack-ish near the end, but I figured we needed a break after Will's kill.

Next time on Of Bright Eyes and Brighter Wounds (OBEBW): Hannibal and Will do not leave for Prague as planned.

Detailed trigger / content warning: Will basically talks his target into committing suicide using his empathy abilities. It's not super detailed, but please use caution.

If you liked this, please hit the kudos button! Also, remember to subscribe to the series if you want more of OBEBW. Thank you so much.

Edit 7/21: I changed some of the timing of past events (before current story). More info in the next update.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!